



Marines West

Serving the recruiting family of the 12th Marine Corps District

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Photo by Sgt. Clinton Firstbrook, Photo Illustration by Sgt. C.R. Rye
ARLINGTON, Va. – The grand finale of Washington's Independence Day fireworks display goes out with a bang over the Marine Corps War Memorial July 4. The fireworks were launched from the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool. Prior to the 1900s, guns and cannons were used to commemorate the Fourth of July holiday; however, this caused hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries.
 Back cover Photo Illustration by Sgt. C.R. Rye



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 SSgt. N.M. Dodson SFO
 SSgt. C.T. Matthews SEA
 SSgt. J.J. Valdez SEA

2006 June Transitional Recruiting

Monthly Mission:
 Direct Assignment Program -6
 Direct Referral -20
 Active Reserve -0
 Monthly Attained:
 Direct Assignment Program -16
 Direct Referral -36
 Active Reserve -11
 Fiscal Year To Date:
 Total # of Marines Briefed
 -11,261



Commander's Column

MARINES PERSISTENCE, PROFESSIONALISM KEEP TEAM 12 IN THE HUNT

Team 12,

Let me pass on my most sincere congratulations on another victory during June at the end of a tough direct market FMAM. The professionalism and persistence of our recruiting Marines paid off handsomely as 6 of 8 RSs once again made their CMC mission and 5 of 8 Recruiting Stations met the District goal.

Your diligence in staying in the grad market resulted in the District maintaining a 70/30 grad/senior split. This is a must as we struggle to fill some near term shipping holes, especially on the Reserve side. The District continues to recruit the highest quality individuals as we wrote 70% MG IIAs in June. Overall Team 12 wrote 839 total contracts and had 23.3% pool attrition compared to 721 contracts with 19.1% pool attrition in FY05. Your contracting ability and potential is clearly evident! Make every round count and place them diligently in accordance with your mission letters.

We continue to ship well prepared, quality recruits as evidenced by our 5.95% MCRD attrition rate last month, giving us a year to date rate of 11.52%. I congratulate each and every one of you for your hard work last month.

My special thanks to our main effort - the canvassing recruiters and their dedicated SNCOICs for contracting and shipping quality young men and women each day, week and month. Thanks to our many supporting efforts

- the eight RS command groups and 'A' billets in direct support, the District Ops folks who coordinate and manage all that effort, and the District support folks who provide the resources and technical support to keep the District moving forward.

June saw several changes of command around the District. I'd like to bid farewell to Maj. Morris from Portland, Maj. Bradney from Salt Lake City, and Maj. Samarov from San Francisco. Good luck at the Command and Staff College and out in the Operating Forces. Welcome aboard to our new commanders, Maj. Shepard in Portland, Maj. Connolly in Salt Lake City, and Maj. Pascoli in San Francisco. You are all taking over outstanding organizations, and I know that under your leadership your RSs will continue the tradition of Balanced Excellence.

June marks the opening of the senior market for all RSs. Ensure you maintain a balanced attack of at least 50/50 grads to seniors. Some of you will be focused on your near term shipping requirements but do not lose sight of this vital market. We will reap the benefits of your efforts in the HS/CC program over the coming year. We need to work for across the board penetration of our priority one schools, not just focusing on one or two schools. My intent is to have at least a 45% start pool for FY07 on 30 September and attack 1st Trimester with undaunted resolve. Continue



the excellent job of preparing your pooltees for recruit training.

As we near the end of the fiscal year, challenges abound. We need to close out the FY06 Reserve shipping mission with 69 remaining open QSNs to fill. We are still in the hunt for a variety of instruments to close out the FY06 MEOP shipping mission. Plan well and execute accordingly. We stand ready to support you in this effort.

Congratulations again on your superior June performance. Special thanks to your families who support us all. Stay focused on the mission, take care of one another, and be safe out there.

Semper Fi,

Inner city kids, Marines kick off local olympics

Staff Sgt. Bobbie J. Bryant
Recruiting Station Los Angeles

LOS ANGELES — In December Laurel Street Elementary School children were wide eyed and full of curiosity when the Marines showed up to deliver hundreds of toys. Now, months later the children attending the school run up to the Marines as soon as they step foot on the Laurel Street Elementary School campus in Compton, Calif. In a city gang-infested where drugs and drive-by shootings are a common occurrence, the Marines reach out to show these children there is a different side to the life they know.

Marines from Recruiting Station Los Angeles were at the school June 8 to assist with the annual Olympics on one of their many visits since adopting

the school last fall.

The day was filled with intense competition between each class per grade level. The Marines kept the motivation level high and encouraged the children to shout encouragements to one another. “Who’s the best,” shouted Sgt. Guillermo Medrano, a logistics assistant with RS Los Angeles. “We are,” replied a group of third graders as they prepared for the tug-of-war challenge.

Madrano kept each group he was assigned to throughout the day full of energy and excited. Even if the children did not win a particular event he went by and high-fived every child.

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Photo by Staff Sgt. Bobbie J. Bryant

(Bottom) Sergeant Guillermo Medrano, a logistics assistant at Recruiting Station Los Angeles, of Newhall, Calif. encourages children at Laurel Street Elementary School in Compton, Calif. June 8 during their annual Olympics. **(Top)** Sergeant Guillermo Medrano, a logistics assistant at Recruiting Station Los Angeles, of Newhall, Calif. high-fives children after a victory in the tug-of-war. The Marines were at Laurel Street Elementary School in Compton, Calif. June 8 to support the school's annual Olympics.

Everett recruiter brings tenacity to streets

Sgt. Phuong Chau

Recruiting Station Seattle

SEATTLE — America is considered by many as the melting pot of the world with its citizens bringing their special uniqueness to this country. For one Marine, what was brought to this country was a sense of duty and appreciation for our country.

Overcoming challenges is nothing new for Sgt. Enrique Peña, canvassing recruiter, Recruiting Substation Everett. Peña, a native of Miami, Fla., was exiled from Cuba when he moved to Miami in 1990.

“It was good because I had an opportunity to better my life,” explained Peña.

Many of Peña’s family members are still in Cuba including his mother whom he has not seen in 16 years. Even though he is originally from Cuba, and was recruited out of Miami, Peña jokes that he considers home wherever the Marine Corps tells him it is.

“I’ve always been an individual who likes challenges and there is an exclusiveness to the Marine Corps that I like,” explained Peña.

Having been afforded so many opportunities in America, Peña felt it was important to serve to preserve the American way of life. Peña said if it was possible, at the time he may have enlisted into the Marine Corps as a sophomore. Back then, he was a regular pool function participant, and knew that the Marine Corps was his path.

A machine gunner by trade, the five-year veteran volunteered for recruiting duty. Peña was in the Delayed Entry Program for so long, he felt his experience made him a good fit for the job.

According to Master Sgt. Homer B. Sanchez, noncommissioned officer-in-charge, RSS Everett, Peña has a 2.1 NET APR for FY06 to date. Since his going on production in July, Peña has written all high school graduates shipping 13 of his 19 contracts to boot camp. Sanchez attributed this success to the high level of motivation and humor that Peña brings to the office each day.

“He has helped make shipping and over shipping for RS Seattle,” said Sanchez. “He is also tapping into a previous untapped market (referring to Peña’s cultural background).”

Peña just feels that he is just doing his job.

“I’m not doing anything special. I am here to provide individuals for the Marine Corps to fill the ranks,” explained Peña, who also displays a great sense of fun while recruiting future Marines. He never loses sight of the importance of a recruiter’s mission. He believes that recruiting duty and the infantry are closely related. With recruiting duty and infantry, any little detail that is overlooked can stop the mission.

“There is no next time. Everybody is counting on you to do



Photo by Sgt. Phuong Chau

Sergeant Enrique Peña, is currently serving as a canvassing recruiter at RSS Everett, RS Seattle. Peña has a 2.1 NET APR for FY06 to date. Since his going on production in July, Peña has written all high school graduates shipping 13 of his 19 contracts to boot camp.

your part,” said Peña.

With the successes Peña has achieved so far, he believes that he could not do his job without his wife and 16-month-old daughter. Both are very supportive which provides him the motivation and the peace of mind he needs to accomplish the mission.

To keep up with his success, Peña focuses on some key points such as: volume, networking and, finding individuals who have a small flame of interest and turning their interest into a large fire. Peña looks forward to the remainder of his time on recruiting duty.

“I’m just here to work hard and do my part by contributing to the Marine Corps in order to be successful,” concluded Peña.

Shepard Takes the Helm over Centurions

Sgt. Leonard Langston
Recruiting Station Portland

PORTLAND, Ore. — Major Jason L. Morris relinquished command of Recruiting Station Portland to Major Ladd W. Shepard during a change of command ceremony held at the Vietnam Veterans of Oregon Memorial on June 30.

Morris served as commanding officer of Recruiting Station Portland for three years and will be leaving the RS to attend the Command and Staff College in Quantico, Va.

Under the command of Maj. Morris, RS Portland earned the distinction for being Western Recruiting Region Marine Corps Recruiting Station of the Year for Fiscal Year 2004 and 2005.

Colonel Arthur J. Corbett, 12th Marine Corps District Commanding Officer spoke during the ceremony and praised the Marines for their dedication to mission and excellence. "Marines I want to commend you on three highly successful years," said Corbett.

"A commander doesn't do it by himself," Morris said. "I applaud you on your hard work and the personal sacrifices that you have made for your Corps and country while I have been at the helm of this magnificent organization."

During the three years, the RS enlisted and shipped almost 2,500 Marines to recruit training and officer candidate school, according to Morris.

"The Nation and your Corps will be eternally grateful for your efforts," Morris said.

Shepard feeling blessed to join a successful team thanked Morris for his dedication to the mission.

"It is truly a blessing to join this team and inherit the stewardship of such a fine organization," Shepard said. "His steadfast leadership, patriotism and valor under unrelenting arduous conditions speaks volumes about his individual character and sincere desire to do what Marines do best, which is accomplishing the mission."

Shepard a combat veteran comes up against new challenges that a recruiting command demands.

"Over the next three years, I will be in the trenches slashing and jabbing alongside you," said Shepard.

"I have served in Iraq alongside some of the Marines that you recruited,

said Shepard. "Those men inspired me each day as they continuously took the fight to the enemy. You have truly sought out and enlisted Marines of the highest quality. You should be proud of yourselves and your contribution to our Nation as we fight the Global War on Terrorism."

In his address, Shepard left no doubt that he plans to continue the attack and make mission.

"I will lead you from the front all the way," said Shepard.



"I applaud you on your hard work and the personal sacrifices that you have made for your Corps and country while I have been at the helm of this magnificent organization."

Major Jason L. Morris, Recruiting Station Portland commanding officer

Marines reflect on recent combat ops in Fallujah

Cpl. Graham A. Paulsgrove
1st Marine Division

CAMP KOREAN VILLAGE, Iraq — After more than a month of living out of armored vehicles and combating insurgents daily near Fallujah, nearly 100 U.S. Marines recently returned to this region in western Al Anbar province to continue security and stability operations.

After months of life “on the road” throughout Fallujah, Marines from the Twentynine Palms, Calif.-based D Company, 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, have returned to western Iraq to help their parent battalion maintain security and stability.

“This is a lot quieter area than what we came from - every day we were guaranteed something would happen,” said Pfc. Nathan D. Wagner, a 22-year-old team leader with Company D.

Nearly two weeks back at their base in this wide, rural desert region of Al Anbar, the Marines spent days on the move in and around Fallujah, a city of approximately 200,000 which was the site of major combat operations between coalition forces and insurgents in November 2004.

For 60-plus days, the Marines spent their time in and out of their eight wheeled light armored vehicles maintaining security, rooting out insurgents, looking for improvised explosive devices and conducting humanitarian missions in Kharma, a town on Fallujah’s outskirts, and in Habbaniyah, a large town lying between Fallujah and Ramadi.

Both cities are still hotbeds of insurgent activity.

Life on the road

After two weeks of working alongside Iraqi soldiers in Al Qaim,

a city near the Iraqi-Syrian border, the Marines were sent to Kharma, where kept a heavily-trafficked section of road between Fallujah and Baghdad clear of insurgent activity. They also assisted ground Marines – infantrymen – with operations in Fallujah’s neighboring town of Habbanyah.

After their operations in the Sunni Triangle were completed, they went to Haditha to help provided security for a raid which resulted in the capture of a high ranking terrorist in the insurgency.

“I honestly think we’re making Iraq a better place,” said Wagner. “We’re getting rid of insurgents a few at a time but it’s a long and hard road, and there will always be bad guys. But we are making it harder for them to operate.”

D Company roamed the cities and countryside in Light armored vehicles – armored troop carriers which Marines say are ideal for any terrain. Sturdy, safe, the vehicles also pack a punch in combat – each has three mounted machine guns. Plus, the vehicles are capable of traveling 70-plus miles per hour and traverse nearly any type of terrain.

For weeks at a time, the company lived out of their vehicles, sleeping inside or next to them, seldom returning to a base for a hot meal or shower, according to Cpl. Joseph Sherwood, a team leader in the company.

“We never had a place to come home to since we were always on the move, so the vehicles were our homes,” said Sherwood, a native Orlando, Fla.

“We were ‘nomadic warriors,’” said Cpl. Mike J. Murray, an optics technician with the company. “We went all over the place, and we had food, water, fuel and ammo, so we were good.”

Under fire, body armor pays dividends

Though the company did not suffer any deaths during its time near Fallujah, three Marines were injured during a rocket attack in Kharma.

On three different occasions, three other Marines would have been injured from sniper fire, but all walked away with slight bruising from the impact of 7.62 mm rounds into their protective body armor. All three attributed their body armor to saving their lives.

The Marines say the threat of sniper fire and IED attacks was constant.

While being the lead man on a patrol through Habbanyah looking for IEDs, 21-year-old Pfc. Jason Hanson, from Forks, Wash., was knocked off his feet after he was shot in the chest by an insurgent during a small skirmish.

“I saw [Hanson] on the ground, ran up to him and rolled him over,” said Seaman Chad T. Kenyon, one of the company’s Navy corpsmen and a 20-year-old from Tucson, Ariz. “I saw that the round had gone through the front of his flak, so I opened up his flak and



Photo by Cpl. Graham A. Paulsgrove

Corporal Joseph E. Sherwood, a 29-year-old from Orlando, Fla., assigned to Company D, 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, checks out a suspicious pile of dirt for any signs of a roadside bomb.

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Future Marines steal spotlight at Hiller Air Show

Sgt. Christine C. Odom

Recruiting Station San Francisco

SAN CARLOS, Calif. — Thousands of spectators gathered at the 7th Annual Vertical Challenge Helicopter Air Show at the Hiller Aviation Museum on June 17 to observe high-flying acrobatics performed by various helicopter teams, an assortment of helicopter exhibits, from past and present, and meet a few proud patriots who are serving in the Armed Forces.

In addition, audiences witnessed the first step young men and women take to a successful military future as 10 poolées of Recruiting Substation San Mateo, Recruiting Station San Francisco, swore the Oath of Enlistment before a large crowd of Bay Area residents.

“Not everyone can be a Marine, so when these young men and women decided to enlist in the Marine Corps, they chose to be among ‘The Few and The Proud,’” said Staff Sgt. Thomas D. Sanford, canvassing recruiter, RSS San Mateo. “Becoming a Marine is no easy feat, and it says a lot about these poolées.”

Sandra J. Preza, 18, a native of Redwood City, Calif., was one of the poolées from San Mateo who took the oath.

“I am going to do something most girls wouldn’t be capable of doing,” Preza said. “This is one more step toward where I want to be in the future. I have been given this great opportunity to better my life, and I know I can do it.”

As aviators took to the air demonstrating their death-defying aerobatics, the Marine recruiters swarmed the grounds and challenged people to test their strength on the pull-up bar by maximizing their chin-ups or flexed-arm hang. In addition, potential prospects put their speed and endurance on line by competing at the inflatable obstacle course which was part of the Marines recruitment set up.

“It’s my first time coming to this air show, so I didn’t expect to see activities like the [obstacle course and chin-up challenge],” said David Cintz, a resident of Chico, Calif. “I jumped on the bar thinking I could knock out 20 with no problem, but didn’t quite have enough strength to get them all. The Marines are pretty tough.”

While spectators outside viewed the static displays and interacted with the pilots, visitors inside had the opportunity to educate themselves at the museum’s exhibits, which chronicles a century of aviation history and also provides a glimpse into air transportation’s future with a display of vintage and futuristic aircraft, prototypes, photos and models.

According to Denis Dineen, air show coordinator and retired Marine, the show is devoted to educating the public on how helicopters affect our daily lives from traffic and news reports to their unique lifesaving ability and monumental role in our nation’s defense.

“I can’t think of a better way to commemorate the past, present and future of aviation than this air show, and I would also like to wish those young men and women the best as they become the future of the Marine Corps,” he concluded.





Photos by Sgt. Christine C. Odom

(Top) Among the fleet of helicopters on display during the air show, was a CH-53E 'Super Stallion' helicopter. Marine pilots from Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron-769, Marine Aircraft Group 46 flew from Marine Corps Air Station Miramar to participate in the event. (Middle) Air show attendees rushed over and under the various obstacles on the inflatable course competing to see who could get to the end first. (Far Left) Sandra J. Preza, a native of Redwood City, Calif., was one of 10 poolies from San Mateo to swear the Oath of Enlistment before an air show crowd. (Right) Spectators viewed the static displays that were set up on the flightline and interacted with pilots, and aircrew personnel. Visitors inside the hangars had the opportunity to learn about general aviation history as they toured at the museum's exhibits. The air show is devoted to educating the public on how helicopters affect our daily lives from traffic and news reports to their unique lifesaving ability and monumental role in our nation's defense.

Gunfighters' get combat vet to revitalize ranks



Photo by Sgt. C.R. Rye

Major Michael V. Samarov, commanding officer of Recruiting Station San Francisco, relinquished command to Maj. Sean W. Pascoli, in a ceremony held at the Marines Memorial Club.

Sgt. Christine C. Odom

Recruiting Station San Francisco

SAN FRANCISCO, Calif. — Major Michael V. Samarov, commanding officer of Recruiting Station San Francisco, relinquished command to Maj. Sean W. Pascoli, in a ceremony held at the Marines Memorial Club on June 30.

Pascoli, a native of Morgantown, W. Va., takes command of the “Gunfighters” after returning from an operation in support of Iraqi Freedom. He served as the operations officers for Weapons Company, 1st Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, 1st Marine Division.

“I’ve heard that recruiting is a tough business,” said Pascoli, who is an infantryman by trade. “That’s probably

why I chose to come here, because of the challenge.”

There is no question that Maj. Pascoli has a difficult road ahead of him as he commands this recruiting station, remarked Col. Arthur J. Corbett, 12th Marine District commanding officer. However, there is no doubt in my mind that he will overcome the adversity and indifference associated with recruiting in San Francisco, and ultimately lead the recruiting station into a successful future.

With the summer months already at hand, Pascoli steps in during the busiest time for the RS due to the higher volume of contracting and shipping. Subsequently, RS SFO has the second largest mission goal within 12MCD.

The Recruiting Station's area of operations spans more than 24,000

square miles, which extends from the southern boundary of Monterey County to just south of the Oregon border. The population of the area is approximately 7.5 million people. The population density is approximately 3,105 people per square mile.

“I am honored to have this opportunity to serve as your commanding officer,” said Pascoli after assuming command. “I look forward to spending a lot of time with you over the next three years as we attack the dynamic challenge that is recruiting duty.”

Pascoli closed the ceremony by wishing the Samarov family good luck in their future endeavors as they move on to their next assignment and duty station.

Samarov is scheduled to attend the Command and Staff College at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va.

Educators observe transformation of civilians to Marines

Sgt. Krystal N. Leach

Recruiting Station Sacramento

MARINE CORPS RECRUIT DEPOT, San Diego — A large group of 74 educators from Recruiting Stations Sacramento and San Francisco's areas of operation learned first-hand about the transformation that some of their former students experienced through the challenge called "Marine Corps Recruit Training" June 26-30.

For one solid week these high school and college level teachers, counselors, and other academic professionals toured the Marine Corps Southern California training facilities as part of the 12th Marine Corps District's final Educators Workshop for the 2006 academic year. And for one straight week these Northern California educators were students of the Marine Corps' school of thought, where they saw first-hand what the Corps has to offer today's young men and women.

Prior to arrival, many of the educators expressed feelings of anxiousness about the workshop and excitement to see "boot camp". Many already knew that the Marine Corps is well-known for offering the most challenging recruit training out of the Armed Services.

"I saw a show on Discovery Channel about Marine Corps Boot Camp and it looked so hard!" said Kristina Peterson, advisor, Big Pine High School, Big Pine, Calif. "I couldn't imagine any of my students being able to hack it, but I can see how much of a difference it could make in their lives."

Peterson was not the only educator influenced by stories of Marine Corps Recruit Training, others admitted that they too were not always supporters of the military in general because of the negative politics that sometimes surround it.

"I have to admit that in the past I would never refer any of my students to the military---especially because of the war now in Iraq," said Myndi Hardgrave. "But now I see the other side of it and after meeting all these young men and women in the Marines, I'm just impressed... they're something to be proud of and I now have a new found respect for what they are doing for their country and themselves."

Many educators were very impressed with their one on one time with the recruits in training.

"Talking to these young men really gave me some insight on what a fantastic job the Marines do in building confidence in them. You just don't see that in high school students," said Cindy Levin, counselor, Bella Vista High School, Fair Oaks, Calif.

Levin's comment was reiterated by several other educators during the tour as they received many opportunities to talk with the Marines during the various open-panel discussions.

The tour not only provided the educators with an intimate opportunity to talk to recruits and Marines, but also they received hands on demonstration of what makes a Marine a unique.

"The Marine Corps is more than just a fighting force, it appears to be a true brotherhood (family)," said Debra Kotler, assistant director, Alliant International, Fresno, Calif. "I'm just impressed with the love these (Marines) have for what their doing."



Photos by Sgt. Krystal N. Leach

Educators got to see first-hand how recruits respond to combat-like situations during the Crucible. (Background) Educators look on as recruits tactical a critical thinking reaction course.

"I couldn't imagine any of my students being able to hack it, but I can see how much of a difference it could make in their lives."

Kristina Peterson, advisor, Big Pine High School, Big Pine, Calif.

Hometown Heroes



Photo by Sgt. Clinton Firstbrook

ARLINGTON, Va. – The opening round of Washington's Independence Day fireworks display lights up the Marine Corps War Memorial July 4. Hundreds of National Capitol Area residents gathered around the memorial to witness the patriotic display; however, the event was almost canceled due to rain.



(Left) Marines with 3rd Battalion 8th Marine Regiment sleep at Combat outpost Hawk, which is being constructed with help from Combat Logistics Detachment 115, July 6. The detachment has been transporting Iraqi Army and Iraqi police throughout the city of Ramadi and working to build combat outposts in an effort to establish an Iraqi Army and police presence in the city. Photo by Sgt. Stephen Holt. Sgt. Brock T. Cisneros, a 21-year-old from Salt Lake City, Utah, kneels at the memorials to Lance Cpl. Robert G. Posivio III and Pfc. Steven w. Freund June 2. The two, along with Basra, Iraq-born interpreter known to Marines as "David," were killed in action May 23. Photo by Gunnery Sgt. Mark Oliva

Silver Star recipient returns to Corps

Sgt. M. Trent Lowry

Recruiting Station Orange County

ORANGE COUNTY, Calif. -- When rookie cop Leandro F. Baptista hit the streets of Glendale, Calif., in February to battle drug dealers, gang bangers and other classes of murderous ruffians, it wasn't like he'd never been in harm's way before. As a matter of fact, he'd seen much worse.

As a sergeant with 1st Reconnaissance Battalion, Baptista deployed to Iraq for two tours before separating from the Corps in 2004. During Baptista's second deployment, his actions earned him the Silver Star medal, one of the nation's highest decorations for valor in combat.

Having completed one enlistment in the Marine Corps, Baptista separated from the military in order to spend more time with his girlfriend, Isnara, whom he married eight months ago. He spent time in Miami, Fla., then moved to Costa Mesa, Calif., and signed on with the Glendale, Calif., police department. After completing the academy, he hit the streets to 'Serve and Protect.' But in the back of his mind, he always felt he'd rather be one of 'the Few, the Proud.'

"I've got the blood of a gunfighter in me," Baptista said. "The Corps is part of me."

So after patrolling the streets of Glendale and seeing the repetitive and mundane aspects of the job, Baptista decided to re-enlist in the Marine Corps.

"In the police department there isn't the intensity of the Marine Corps," said Baptista, 25. "The guys in the police department would get complacent a lot. That wasn't for me."

Baptista studied criminal justice at Miami-Dade College after graduating high school, but his heart had always been set on enlisting in the Marine Corps. Baptista immigrated to the U.S. from Brazil when he was 14, without his parents and living with friends, expressly so he could become a leatherneck.

He joined the Marines Sept. 2000 and immediately stood out. Baptista earned company honorman and a meritorious promotion to lance corporal out of recruit training at Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, S.C., and earned the rank of sergeant within his first four years, first as an M-220 Tube-launched, Optically-tracked, Wire-guided missile gunner and later as a recon Marine.

"I liked the missions a lot, and being out there with the quality group of guys I worked with," Baptista said of his first experience with 1st Recon Bn.

But after completing three deployments, two of those during Operation Iraqi Freedom, one might wonder why Baptista would reenlist in the Marines.

"It is a bigger motivator for me to go to Iraq and help keep America safe from terrorists than to look for criminals," Baptista said, citing his patriotism for his new country (he was naturalized as a U.S. citizen in 2002) as a driving force in his decision to become an active duty Marine again.

Baptista's Silver Star came for actions he performed during his second OIF stint in 2004. His convoy came under ambush, and his quick thinking and leadership under fire, and the neutralization of the enemy threat, earned the notice and praise of his superiors. But to hear Baptista tell the story, it was just part of a day's work.

"I was just doing my job, doing stuff I was trained to do," Baptista said. "I was in the right place at the right time, I guess. Everybody in the platoon deserved an award."

Now he will get the chance to get back into the fight, and that's all Baptista's asking for.

"I didn't want to wonder the rest of my life about what it would have been like if I'd stayed in," said Baptista, who had to convince his wife that reenlisting was the right choice. "I don't want to sit on the sidelines; I want to be part of the action."

Now that the Marine Corps has a Special Operations Command, Baptista has expressed a strong desire to be one part of the team that gets to shape the SOC as it evolves.

"I want to be involved, even if it's only my one cent, and be able to help mold it into a successful unit," said Baptista about SOC. "I found my niche in the Marines, and while I still can, I want to be part of it."

"I feel a lot more fulfilled being a part of something that matters," Baptista said.



Olympics... from 4

"He is so inspiring to these children," said Deanna Pruitt, a fifth grade teacher from Norwalk, Calif. "The children really like him and he seems so comfortable around them. We hope to see more of him at the school.

Laurel Street Elementary School is filled with children eager to learn and be mentored. The Marines continue in their commitment by being at the Olympics and by assisting the staff in a supervisory role, Pruitt said.

"Who better to show the children about teamwork, leadership and living a healthy lifestyle than the Marines," she said.

The children participated in softball, a 50-yard dash, tug-of-war, soccer and the long jump. Each class competed against each other per grade level and Marines helped give out awards at the end of the day.

The Olympics is only one event the Marines have supported for the school.

Not only did each child receive a toy from the Marines last Christmas, but a few children received some very special gifts.

"The Marines surprised some children by giving 10 bikes, 30 scooters, 5 toddler cars and the preschool children received backpacks," said Penelipa L. Carter, a teacher from Los Angeles.

Our children now have Marines come and read to them, they supervised our recent school prep testing, they have shown our fifth graders how to drill and taught them different exercises, they visit classes and give them motivational talks about opportunities in the Marine Corps, They took some children to see the Marine Battle Color Detachment at the Rose Bowel, taken trips to Chuck E. Cheese, they have assisted in providing a barbeque to the some children at a park, and even helped supervise a trip to Disneyland for the fifth grade, Carter said.

"They are role models to our students,"

Carter said. "Now the children can see with their own eyes and think to their selves, 'Wow... I can do that! I can be like them.'"

Teachers and children are no the only people happy to have the Marines helping out. Parents are also pleased to see that the children have mentors in the school.

"The children are exposed to the Marine Corps and this will inspire them to stay focused in school. The Marines have shown them that education is important and if they stay in school, stay off drugs and exercise they can also do well in life and maybe be Marines also if they want," said LaTonya A. Ford, a parent of a fourth grader at the school and resident of Compton.

"It is awesome that these guys and girls take the time to come out to an inner city school and encourage our children," she said.

Fallujah... from 7

saw no bleeding. Then he looked up at me and said, 'I'm fine, Doc.'"

The body armor, while heavy and cumbersome, did its job - save the life of its wearer.

"I'm happy to carry the extra weight," said Hanson, grinning slightly.

Hanson's brush with death was not uncommon for the hardened warriors of D Company - Sgt. Joshua S. Adams, a 21-year-old vehicle commander from Bowling Green, Mo., was hit while his platoon cordoned off an area with an IED in it.

"We were blocking off a road and one car pulled up from a side street, and the guy in the back of vehicle started moving around to face us, and as I was telling Sgt. Adams, he got hit," said Lance Cpl. Kyle V. Lyons, 25, the gunner on Adam's vehicle from Houston. "He dropped down and then said he was fine."

"My gunner took over while I assessed my wounds and pulled some shrapnel out of my arm, then we chased down the car," said Adams. "The round went into my SAPI but when it hit, the round shattered and some of it went into my wrist."

"SAPIs" are the thick, ballistic metal plates placed inside U.S. troops' body armor for protection from shrapnel and small-arms fire.

The vehicle was chased down and the two men were eventually detained. As for the rounds which struck Adams, they could have proven fatal if he had not worn his body armor, according to Petty Officer 3rd Class Jose Mata Jr., 26,

the company's senior corpsmen from Hialeah, Fla.

"The round would have hit him in the liver, causing massive internal damage - it could have been bad," said Mata Jr. "The SAPI plates did their job."

The long drive home

With less than three months left in Iraq before they return to their home station in southern California, the company will continue to operate within its own battle space in western Al Anbar province - a large expanse of desert dotted with small towns, and hundreds of miles away from Fallujah.

"It's good to know that we are on the tail end of a very eventful deployment," said Sherwood, now a two-time veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom. He deployed with another Twentynine Palms-based unit, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marine Regiment, during the initial push to Baghdad in 2003.

While the Marines are glad to be back patrolling desert towns and villages here, some says they miss the excitement and day-to-day action they experienced in the Fallujah region - IEDs, insurgents and all.

Daily patrols and combat operations through Habbiniyah was an "infantryman's dream," said Wagner, who added he'd rather be in the thick of the action in Al Anbar's more urban areas than in what he calls a "quiet desert with a few towns."

"We were in a lot more active areas than what we have out here," said Wagner, a native of Fruitland, Idaho. "This is mainly a quiet desert with a few towns while before we were inside the cities for weeks at a time."

Top Recruiting Substations

RSS	APR	Contracts	%	Marine In Charge
Los Angeles				
Simi Valley	1.80	13	108	SSgt. J.A. Lemos
Glendale	2.67	10	143	SSgt. C. Rodrigo
Orange County				
Santa Ana	1.83	12	100	MSgt. M.L. Orman
Pearl City	2.50	7	117	GySgt. E.G. Pagaragan Jr.
Portland				
East Port	2.75	13	144	GySgt. S.L. Shontez
Roseburg	3.00	4	200	GySgt. W.L. Hess
Sacramento				
Fresno	2.17	13	100	GySgt. M.A. Lopez
None Qualify				
Salt Lake City				
None Qualify				
None Qualify				
San Diego				
Las Vegas	2.25	9	128	GySgt. A. Henry
Riverside	2.67	10	111	GySgt. C.A. Wenner
San Francisco				
Fremont	2.40	13	118	GySgt. M. Reilly
San Mateo	2.33	8	114	SSgt. R. Sandoval Jr.
Seattle				
Spokane	2.80	12	133	GySgt. B.J. Flanagan
Olympia	3.50	7	140	GySgt. G.T. Fisher

Awards

SSgt. R. Sandoval Jr. CERTCOM	SSgt. J.M. Pfister NAM
GySgt. L.G. Hinton CERTCOM	SSgt. L. Oquinn III NAM
MSgt. M.L. Williams CERTCOM	Sgt. V.M. Montanez NAM
SSgt. E. Felix CERTCOM	SSgt. M. Palos NAM
SSgt. Inopiquez CERTCOM	Sgt. I.R. Perez NAM
Cpl. C.P. Alvarez CERTCOM	Sgt. M.E. Zamora NAM
Cpl. L.F. Medina CERTCOM	MSgt. M.A. Tivar NAVYCOMM
Sgt. I.A. Kirk CERTCOM	GySgt. L.D. Harris NAVYCOMM
SSgt. J. Rodriguez CERTCOM	GySgt. R.B. Patel NAVYCOMM
Sgt. J.G. Aiken CERTCOM	LtCol B.W. Beckner NAVYCOMM
Sgt. M.K. Taylor CERTCOM	Capt. W.E. Winkenhoffer III
GySgt. M.J. Reilly CERTCOM	NAVYCOMM
SSgt. R. Gamble CERTCOM	SSgt. M.A. Deschambault NAVY-
SSgt. A. Altan CERTCOM	COMM
SSgt. D.R. Cerrato CERTCOM	Capt. S.C. Waters NAVYCOMM
GySgt. S.H. Maria CERTCOM	GySgt. T.M. Nickerson NAVY-
SSgt. B.M. Lam CERTCOM	COMM
RSS Clairemont CERTCOM	Maj. D.P. Bradney MSM
SSgt. J.A. Weaver NAM	Maj. J.L. Morris MSM

Top Recruiters

	Contracts
ORG Sgt. J.M. Lambkin	5 – 250%
PRT Sgt. N.L. Decavelle	4 – 133%
SEA SSgt. S.A. Storms	5 – 250%
SLC Sgt. K.W. Leishman	3 – 100%
SFO Sgt. M. Meeks	5 – 250%
LAX GySgt. E.S. Ginez	6 – 300%
SAC Sgt. White	3 – 100%
SDO Sgt. M.W. Garrett	2 – 100%

Heavy Hitters

	Contracts
SDO Sgt. D.T. Williams	5
SDO SSgt. E.J. Fonseca Jr.	5
LAX Sgt. A.C. Estrada	5
SLC SSgt. G.S. Rogers	5
SLC Sgt. W.S. Koehler	5
ORG Sgt. J.M. Lambkin	5
ORG SSgt. J.M. Finnell Jr.	5
SEA SSgt. A.A. Belmonte	5
SEA Sgt. C.J. Foster	5
SEA Sgt. R.L. Calica	5
ORG Sgt. B.L. Boggs	4
ORG Sgt. T.J. Allen	4
ORG SSgt. M.H. Angulocota	4
ORG SSgt. J.B. Guerra	4
ORG Sgt. T.K. Teruya	4
ORG Sgt. N.G. Diaz	4
PRT SSgt. J.R. Fletcher	4
PRT GySgt. D.C. Nash	4
PRT Sgt. B.J. Gilbert	4
PRT SSgt. J.A. Mezahernandez	4
PRT Sgt. N.L. Decavelle	4
PRT GySgt. K.E. King III	4
PRT Sgt. B.J. Warming	4
SDO Sgt. C.J. Guitron	4
SDO SSgt. J.L. Bowman	4
SDO Sgt. V. Villaman	4
SAC SSgt. C. Cortez	4
SAC SSgt. N.J. Brown	4
SAC SSgt. A.S. Hecker	4
SAC SSgt. J.A. Flores	4
SAC Sgt. J.W. Furlong	4
SEA SSgt. J.E. Murphy	4
LAX Sgt. I. Perez	4
LAX Sgt. O.A. Felix	4
LAX Sgt. R. Anthony	4
LAX Sgt. G.K. Meguerian	4
LAX Sgt. S. Luna	4
LAX Sgt. D.A. Barlett	4
LAX Sgt. K.A. Cardinell	4
SFO SSgt. J. Moroney	4
SFO SSgt. N. Sannicolas	4
SFO Sgt. J. Edmond	4
SFO Sgt. J. Martinez	4

